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ABSTRACT

A longitudinal study of the process of planning and implementing an inservice program in a large urban school district was conducted. After extensive interviews with participants, a premise that collaborative planning contributes to the successful implementation of an innovation emerged. This method of planning is characterized by project plans that are made with equal input from the project managers (the Top) and the persons whose behavior is to be changed (the Grassroots). Throughout the egalitarian planning effort, all layers of participants in the change process are jointly involved in decision making, and each enjoys an equal share of planning power. Collaborative planning can appear in yet another form, "dialectical collaboration". This is distinguished by an integration of directives from the Top, Grassroots action, and joint planning. Impetus for change may come from the Top or the Grassroots, and collaborative planning implements the change. The implications of these findings for developing large-scale inservice programs successfully are discussed. (JD)

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A Longitudinal Study of the Process of Planning and Implementing An Instructional Improvement Inservice Program

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An Instructional Improvement Inservice Program

> It must be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to plan,more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new system.
>
> --Machiavelli

These words are as true when applied to educational change today as they were in 1513 when Machiavelli offered his advice to The Prince. But now there exists a growing and helpful body of research on the process of planning and implementing educational change. Attention has been especially focused on the Rand study of federal programs supporting educational change (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). This study resulted in the presentation of propositional statements about the best conditions and procedures for achieving and maintaining educational changes. Among its conclusions was the premise that collaborative plannning contributes to the successful implementation of an innovation.

Collaborative planning has been heralded in much of the recent literature on staff development as well (Bush & Enemark, 1975; Edelfelt, 1977; Goodlad, 1975; Nadler & Merron, 1980). It has been credited with maximizing the participants' investment in the projects' success, while minimizing the trainees' sense of being perceived as deficient and in need of correction (Lieberman & Miller, 1978; McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978). Teachers, administrators, college faculty, and staff-development directors all want

themselves to be in control of educational changes; and joint planning is at least a step above being the targeted recipients of someone else's planned change (Johnson & Yeakey, 1977; Joyce, McNair, Diaz, & McKibbin, 1976; Mann, 1976).

But there is some question about just exactly what constitutes collaboration. Little attention has been paid to variations in the form of collaborative efforts (Fullen & Pomfret, 1977, p. 378). The implication has been that collaboration somehow involves pure, simultaneous, collective initiation; planning; and implementation between those to be changed (the Grassroots) and the organization administrators (the Top). Without additional refinement, collaboration stands the chance of becoming yet another popular slogan to which all can pay lip service, but which none finds useful in practice. There is, then, an incipient theoretical base for collaborative educational change efforts, but there is a need for that base to be refined and extended.

The purpose of the present study was to refine elements of the theory on planning and implementing educational innovations using a research tool specifically designed for theory generation. The investigators conducted a longitudinal case study of the process of planning and implementing an in-service instructional improvement program in a large metropolitan school district. The grounded theory approach was used (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), not to verify or refute existing educational change theory, but to refine and extend it through a grounding in data. The collaboration element of that theory work will be the central issue considered here.

History of the Study

In the mid 1970s an in-service program known as Instructional Theory into Practice (Hunter, 1976) was introduced in the Pacific Northwest. The Washington State Department of Education saw the program as a means to help teachers better teach to the state's recently mandated student-learning objectives. The department actively publicized the program, and it was enthusiastically instituted in many districts.

Early in the 1979-80 academic year, a study was begun by the present investigators on the history and current status of the ITIP program in the state. By January 1980, focus was brought to a single large central metropolitan district which had just, during that academic year, instituted an ITIP program. District approval was received to pursue a study of the development of the program in the district, and the case study was begun.

Procedure

Interviews with key program personnel and district administrators were scheduled (and continue even at the writing of this report). The interview scheduling followed the snowball technique, where information in one interview leads to the interview of others who may add pertinent information. Most frequently interviewed were the coordinator, the staff-development director, and central office administrators. Those interviewed were first questioned about their perceptions of the history of the program, their own and others' roles in the work, the current status of the project, and pre-

dicted futures. Responses were recorded verbatim by both investigators, who carried out all interviews as a team.

After each interview, field notes were consolidated, analyzed, and compared to the other interview protocols. Incidents or bits were then placed into tentative conceptual categories. The tentative categories, elements, and interrelationships that emerged during the early analysis subsequently informed the development of additional questions to be used in follow-up interviews and in interviews with new participants. Data gathered from the new interviews became the basis for additional coding, categorization, property delineation, and refinement of earlier formulations. This interlocking data gathering and data analysis, called the "constant comparative" method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 101-115), continued until the investigators could present the theory-in-process in some detail.

Development of the Initial Project

The following chronology was constructed as a data-base for hypothesis generation:

During the 1978-79 academic year, secondary principals had received increasing pressure from the central administration to improve their instructional leadership, particularly in the area of teacher evaluation. In a workshop attended by the district's principals and members of the central administration, the secondary principals spearheaded a request for the adoption of the ITIP inservice program for themselves and their

teachers. The administrator responsible for staff development agreed to initiate the project by allocating monies for the employment of a program coordinator and trainers.

But, how had the principals discovered the inservice they were later to request? An elementary principal--who was later to become the inservice project coordinator--had attended a regional ITIP preview session sponsored by the state department of education. He found it exciting and traveled at his own expense to California in the summer to be trained in the program. In the following academic year, in addition to providing the ITIP training to teachers in his building and in the Title IV program, he arranged an ITIP preview session for his fellow principals. It was largely in response to this preview that the principals later that year requested their own training in the ITIP program.

It was not surprising that, as the only in-district person trained in the program, this elementary principal was selected as coordinator of the district's ITIP program. He was requested to prepare a four-year plan for the training of principals and teachers. Training workshops were initiated in 1979-1980 for principals and teachers. Participation was voluntary.

Even though four teacher trainers were made part of the program staff, the primary focus of the coordinator was always the principals' training. In this project, the principals were clearly the "grassroots." Of course, some principals were more enthusiastic about actually participating in the training than others. Some became reluctant to participate after their

requested program had become a time-consuming reality. The project director, who was not a "line" authority, could not require the principals to participate in the inservice sessions. Many principals began the training only to drop out.

Questions soon arose about the continued funding of the project. Then came announcements from the central office of severe budget cuts, personnel shakeups at the higher reaches of the central office, and school closures. Nevertheless, the project coordinator lobbied for expansion of the project. But no one could be sure if even his position would be continued for another year. In fact, it was not. The project coordinator was to maintain the role, but also returned to a half-time principalship.

Without "line" commitment to the program, the scenario was all too familiar: an innovation is born, enjoys a brief flourish, but soon withers under the weight of systemic inertia, budget constraints, and internal politics.

Then, during the second year of the project, a restructuring of the administrative hierarchy occurred and two new "line" figures from the central office threw their support behind the project. Though they did not control the financing of the project, they could and did use their "line" weight to influence the participation of the principals in the project. With the surge of "line" support from downtown, the inservice project was given new life. Participation and attendance were strongly urged, follow-up programs were planned; the project coordinator felt supported with funds from one source and "muscle" from the "boss."

In summary, the investigators found this sequence of events: The Top encouraged the Grassroots to improve their role-specific skills. A no-obligation preview was presented to the Grassroots to which they were free to react candidly. The Grassroots then requested the inservice program and solicited support from the Top in the form of program arrangement and delivery. A project director was appointed from the ranks of the Grassroots--a move that contributed to both the appearance and the subjective experience of "this is our doing." The project director had no line authority; consequently, the program was relegated to the status of a sort of "club"--it had no real support from the Top and had to rely on the waning self-discipline of the Grassroots initiants. The program appeared threatened by the budget as well as by the lack of commitment from both the Grassroots and the Top. Then, after organizational restructuring, line support for the program began; the commitment and "muscle" of central office authority was now employed toward the end of implementing this Grassroots-initiated project.

Hypotheses Generated

Three patterns of project planning were revealed by the Rand Corporation's change agent study (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978). The collaborative planning pattern was found to be necessary for project success. It is characterized by project plans that are made with "equal input" from the project managers (the Top) and the persons whose behavior is to be changed (the Grassroots). This model of collaboration could be called

"egalitarian," and its distinguishing characteristic is parity. Throughout the planning effort, all layers of participants in the change project are jointly involved in decision making, and each enjoys an equal share of planning power.

Our study indicates that collaborative planning can appear in yet another form which can be called "dialectical collaboration." It is distinguished by an integration of top-down, grassroots, and joint planning. At times, grassroots action occurs, giving the participants a sense of control over their development and the feeling that they are choosing to change. At other times, the Top takes charge, giving it its own sense of control and bringing the bureaucratic machinery of the district into alignment with the project aims. Directives from the Top are necessary to puncture the bureaucratic inertia that serves as a sort of force field protecting the status quo from change. Top-down directives further serve to legitimize the position of the project director. Once "just another" middle-management lobbyist seeking the attention of the central administrators, the coordinator is now doing <u>their</u> work.

Dialectical collaboration acknowledges the unique function of all three planning styles. The key difference between the two forms of collaboraton is that the dialectical model <u>integrates</u> the three planning modes while the egalitarian model uses joint planning to <u>overcome</u> the other two. The dialectical pattern may remind one of the music of a good jazz combo--each musician contributes equally in some phases of the number, but each may

also rise to a solo performance or provide accompaniment to the solo of another. The precise order or nature of the musical components is rarely predetermined but grows from the context.

Discussion and Implications

1. To conclude that one model of collaboration is superior to the other would be a tidy ending. But such a conclusion is not warranted. We are more inclined to suggest that both models "work," but one may be more appropriate than the other in certain contexts. It appears that both models can be effective because, to varying degrees, both help met the needs of the two key layers of project personnel, that is, those who administer the project and those whose behavior is to be changed. The common need of these two two groups is the need to subjectively experience being in control. Both models of collaboration respect that need; consequently, both models are likely to be more effective than the exclusive use of either grassroots or top-down planning.

2. Depending on the local setting, one model of collaborative planning may be more effective than the other in meeting the participants' subjective needs. The number of people in the change effort appears to play a central role (see Moch & Morse, 1977). The egalitarian model may be more effective in smaller school districts (or smaller projects within large districts) where it is feasible for a large percentage of project participants to be directly involved in planning. In larger districts, it

would generally be impractical for an equally large percentage of participants to be directly involved in planning. For this reason, a representative system of egalitarian planning is often used. But this is egalitarian collaboration in name only, for it directly meets the subjective needs of only the representatives. It does not provide the rank-and-file grassroots participants with the subjective experience of controlling their own change. In fact, for them it "feels" as imposed as any top-down plan. In larger projects, then, the dialectical model might be more effective with its interplay of top-down, grassroots, and joint planning.

3. The process of dialectical collaboration can be calculated, to some degree, by a project director. Prerequisite to such calculation is the director's ability to maintain a comprehensive perspective on the whole planning-to-implementation process, the many sub-processes, and the actors. This perspective is distinguished by its inclusiveness. Because it is not ideologically anchored in grassroots or top-down or parity planning, this perspective enables the director to orchestrate several planning modes in a way that moves the whole process toward implementation.

Project planning that is guided by a director with a comprehensive perspective is particularly sensitive to the subjective experience of the people whose behavior is to be changed--the Grassroots. These persons believe in what they are already doing (Mann, 1976). Behavior change is made all the more difficult by their inclination to absorb new data into old mental constructs (Olson, 1980). Consequently, their daily routine--

their "dailiness" (Lieberman & Miller, 1978)--is remarkably unbending. For most of the Grassroots, that dailiness is not altered in significant ways unless they have the experience of initiating the change--that is, choosing freely from alternatives.

The first hurdle encountered by the project director, then, is to guide the planning process in such a way that both apparently and experientially, the Grassroots construe the change as self-initiated. Gaining the commitment of the people at the top, once the change has been solicited by the Grassroots, is the second hurdle. Awareness of the need of the top-level administrators to find satisfaction in their role by taking credit for important facilitating decisions in regard to the program can help the project director implement change.

These hypotheses and related speculations are but one building-block in the ongoing process of constructing a theory of the implementation of educational innovations in general, and the nature of collaborative planning in particular. Indeed, these hypotheses need to be scrutinized, refined, and tested. Synthesized with other findings, they may contribute to an understanding of how school change can be achieved.

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